

Witch Hunts, Organized Anarchy, and other Absurdities

Around once a year, there is some story the media seems to latch onto that becomes the focus of many American lives for several months, even years. The O. J. Simpson trial, the Clinton Sex Scandal, the George W. Bush-is-Satan Campaign, and countless local graft scandals each become, for a limited time, the subject of hours, days, weeks, and months of jargon-filled babble and the issue-of-the-day book. It is fascinating to me how many versions of the truth appeared within one month of the Monica Lewinsky case's initial publicization.

One such issue that attracted my notice immediately was the recent case in West Virginia involving a Winfield High School student who wanted to form an Anarchy Club. The national media focused on this case instantly: the liberals wanted to call out the Free Speech goon squad; while the conservatives wanted to keep this disgusting example of negative ideology from corrupting our youth. While on the one hand, I support the idea that any system of education would look down upon and repress the notion of a student club that is inherently anti-system; I also support the idea that any club devoted to discussing political ideas deserves a place in a school: traditionally the location of idea formation.

What I suppose irritated me most about the whole case was the fact that the girl had taken it upon herself to draw up a system of bylaws and rules in order to become an organized club. Nobody, it seems, said anything about the fact that anarchists have a belief that all systems of law and rule are oppressive and unnecessary. The very idea of organized anarchy is contradictory: it is impossible to create a system that is anti-system. How could the Anarchy Club have officers? How could they justify a need to pay dues?

In the interest of brevity, I'll end this diatribe right now. Let us now proceed to political witch-hunts. For some reason, Bill Clinton irritated Republicans to no end. They felt the need to remove him from office at all costs (including so many billions of dollars in taxpayer dollars). They focused on a single aspect of the man's personality, his weakness for women, and exploited it to the fullest. In a single-minded drive to eject him from office, conservative politicians decided to use his extramarital affair against him: he cheated on his wife with an intern, and therefore was evil.

Never mind the excuse: look to the hypocrisy. One of the leaders of this drive, Newt Gingrich, had cheated on his wife and left her for another woman (while she was bedridden with breast cancer) – yet it was President Clinton who had no family values. Receiving oral sex from someone not one's spouse may be a reprehensible act, but it is in no way criminal. Nevertheless, years were spent trying to oust a president from office for adultery. The justification used was that he lied about it under oath – Clinton perjured himself. Ask yourself this, though, what man in his place would not do the same? There should never have been an opportunity for him to lie about the subject, because the president's sex life is no business of ours.

Liberals, in a righteous rage, argued that this was nothing more than a witch-hunt, that conservatives were picking on the president and that this trial was nothing more than an abusive search for any reason to say, "See, I told you he was bad!" Conservatives protested that they were only trying to point out that personal integrity was a chief personality trait that our nation

needed in its leaders. They argued that if he would lie about sex, he would lie about more important things.

Fast forward to the weapons of mass destruction debate over the unilateral invasion of Iraq by the United States. President Bush argued that he felt that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and that those weapons posed a danger to the United States. I am no fan of “W,” but I am inclined to believe that he did, in fact, act in the best interests of the United States *as he saw them*. I do believe that he is stupid enough to assume that such an impoverished and backward nation as Iraq was a rapidly rising nuclear power. Never mind the fact that he pronounces “nuclear” as “new-cue-ler,” which says disturbing things about his alma mater; the most important issue at the time, the liberals argued, should have been the hunt for Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan.

Conservatives argued that liberals were unpatriotic (which is their code word for “picking on us”) and that they should blindly support anything the great and glorious leader undertook. They called the furor a “witch-hunt” and said that investigations about presidential integrity would waste tax dollars. Liberals protested that they were only trying to point out that personal integrity was important, that if a president would lie about such important issues, something had to be done about it.

The point to which I am arriving is becoming apparent, at least I hope. Both sides of this debate are accusing the other of something of which they have been participants themselves. Both sides feel so much hate toward the other that they will do anything to prevent their own side losing ground. Conservatives accuse liberals of engaging in negative propaganda in order to win votes away from their chosen leader: they cite Michael Moore’s work, the columnist Molly Ivins, and the number of books (most recently Kitty Kelly’s biography of the Bush family) appearing that seem to fit the profile of political propaganda. Liberals accuse conservatives of the same thing: they cite the Starr report, Fox “News” Network, and Bill O’Reilly as examples of anti-liberal lies and deceptions perpetrated by Republicans.

Aside from the extraordinary entertainment provided to those able to extricate themselves from personal views in order to see how foolish both parties are acting; little is gained by the finger pointing. Conservatives are not, as liberals are wont to suggest, attempting to solidify a power network of rich white men to rule everything. Many genuinely believe that what they are doing is right: they are governed by certain principles that are traditional (hence conservative as a label); that worked quite well for them and, they believe, will work just as well for others.

Liberals, contrary to prevailing conservative views, are not unpatriotic. They are not communists or traitors. There is nothing more difficult than trying to explain to a conservative than the fact that dissent is a facet of American society guaranteed by the Constitution; and the mere existence of an opposing viewpoint is not an indicator of sympathizing with the enemy. In most of my conversations with liberals, they indicate a deep love for the United States; however, rather than unquestioning acceptance of all administrative policies, they believe that the best way to govern is through constant questioning of the benefits and detriments of said policies toward all citizens.

The next aspect of political polarization that requires examination is the idea of the separation of church and state. Many conservatives will point out that, while the Constitution prohibits the establishment of a state religion, there is nothing specifically in the Constitution that provides for the separation of church and state. They will point out that Thomas Jefferson mentioned the idea in a letter, and that since there is no provision regarding public worship or religion, they should be able to post the Ten Commandments wherever they want.

The media are full of stories regarding the separation of church and state. The case of an Alabama Supreme Court justice who built (at great expense) and installed a statue of the Ten Commandments in a public courthouse was highly publicized. The “under God” phrase in the Pledge of Allegiance is under constant attack by liberal groups. Prayer in public schools is another issue that will surface on occasion; as does (shockingly) the teaching of evolution (which some religious extremists like to term “evil”ution).

As mentioned above, several conservatives will state that the separation of church and state is not legally the responsibility of the government. However, the fact that “Congress will make no law respecting the freedom of religion” is, in itself, a separation of church and state. Individuals in the United States have the freedom to worship or not worship as they choose. While the Ten Commandments may be a nice set of rules to live by, they originate in religious practice. Forced viewing in a public school of the Ten Commandments by one who is not Judeo-Christian is an endorsement of religious views, an establishment of religion in a public forum.

Forcing children to pray in school when they do not subscribe to a religion that believes in prayer is establishing a religious practice in school. Children will pray in school, if they believe they must: many students pray before final exams, and many Muslim students must pray facing Mecca several times a day. I’d like to see the reaction of a conservative who is told that his child must pray in school, with the qualification that he prays on a mat facing Mecca and must pray to Allah. I’d also like to see what would happen if a school board composed of Wicca zealots told parents that their high-school students, having reached maturity, would participate in a nude fertility rite to be held on the school football field.

The teaching of evolution is touchy. If Biology instructors were forced to teach the creation myths of each major religion, there would be no time for Biology and the class would become a philosophy forum. Simply stated, while some people would rather not face the scientific evidence in favor of evolution, it has been scientifically proven by disinterested, neutral scientists from all over the world. Citing a “study” from a scientist seeking to prove only that the world is six thousand years old and that humans magically appeared in the image of God does not constitute science. If a parent prefers his child not hear the theory of evolution, he need only inform his child that such facts are inconsistent with the mythology he subscribes to.

The term “creation science” gives me a headache; because it is a paradox in the first place. “Creation science” relies on the Bible, a mythology, as a scientific text. Teaching the Bible in school being forbidden by the provisions prohibiting the establishment of religion by the government, this idea needs serious revamping. Most subscribers to the idea, in fact, learned the idea in church, where it belongs and must remain. Educators have only so much influence on a child: if a parent disagrees with a certain ideology, his child most likely will as well.

One argument against the separation of church and state is that some religious folks say that it is not in the constitution. This is a technical fallacy that has no grounding in reason (as much religious thought evinces). The freedom to practice whatever form of worship a citizen desires is protected in the Constitution; and the separation of church and state is directly derivative of that. No citizen has the right to impose his beliefs on another forcibly: no governmental official has the right to legislate morality. Each citizen of the United States has the right to believe in whichever morality he so chooses, so long as he does not interfere with the rights of others. Imposition of puritan religious beliefs is a hostile ideological attack on the millions of agnostics and atheists, each of whom can believe however he chooses. Freedom to believe goes hand in hand with freedom of speech.

I believe strongly in political debate. It is the lifeblood of our country: without it there would be no freedom. The pendulum will swing, as is its nature. I am fascinated by the consistent belief that the nation is in a downward spiral; that in such heated debates lays the ultimate end, through polarization, of democratic society. The opposite, in fact, is true. In constantly exposing the negatives of either side, we educate ourselves as to what is positive. If there were none to examine the actions of our leaders, those leaders could rapidly establish total control. If there were none who believed so deeply in their God that they would expose themselves to national ridicule; then the government could freely impose whatever beliefs they so wished (including atheism) upon society.

I do not abhor debate. I relish in it. Debate, such as it exists, prevents more violence than can be attributed to it. If it were necessary to begin a revolution to destroy an evil in our society, we would quickly deteriorate into armed camps. The debate of our political system provides all views a chance to air their grievances and share their solutions for problems. Conservatives may, indeed, be jerks; Liberals may be crybabies: perhaps, after all, these are good things.